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ABSTRACT

This student project involved publishing the author's log of art museum and gallery visits, undertaken as part of a liberal arts class, on some of the computer bulletin boards in the New York City area. Purposes of the project were to share what was learned in the class, to acquire experience with online group interaction, and to determine what is available in the areas of art or culture on these bulletin boards or online services. Five systems were investigated: (1) NYCENET (New York City Educational Network); (2) Learning Link, run by WNET channel 13 educational services; (3) CompuServe, a commercial database service; (4) Design Line, a private local bulletin board for graphic designers and artists; and (5) ECHO, a private bulletin board message base. (ALF)

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RESULTS OF THE ART IN THE CITY PROJECT; ART IN THE CITY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

BY

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Results Of The Art In The City Project;
Art In The City And Telecommunications

In the summer of 1990, I took a liberal arts class called "Art in the City" at Empire State College. Our teacher met us for several Satudays and took us on a walking tour of galleries and exhibits that were out of the way and hard to find in New York City. As a class, we covered Soho, Tri-Beca, the Wall Street area, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The homework assignment was to keep logs of our walking tour and also read the weekly art reviews in Friday's New York Times. We had to pick 8 gallery reviews and 4 museum reviews over the summer and review the reviewer. This meant visiting the sites on our own. I really enjoyed keeping all the logs and I felt good about keeping a portfolio about what I had learned. I don't think I would have taken the time to see and do all these things if it weren't assigned as a class project.

I was at a point in my studies at Empire where I needed advanced standing for my courses so I had to do more for this art course than the regular assignments. For extra credit, I chose to try an experiment with telecommunications. I thought it would really fit in nicely with my Degree program in Education and Multimedia Technology. The project was to publish a log of my museum and gallery visits on some of the computer Bulletin Boards in the New York City area, to share with others, what I had learned in our art class and perhaps get some group interaction on-line. Jackie Battenfield, my teacher, suggested that I also investigate what is available on these Bulletin Boards or Services in the area of ART or Culture. The Bulletin Boards that I visited were: NYCENET-The New York City Educational Network run by the Board of Education of the City of New York; Learning Link-run by WNET channel 13 Educational Services; Compuserve-a commercial Database Service; Design Line-a private local bulletin board for graphic designers and artists; and Echo-a private bulletin board message base. Here are the results of my study.

On NYCENET, I published my log of all our Saturday excursions such as the visits to the Met, Tri-Beca, Soho, Battery Park City, and the Wall Street Area. I also published the 8 gallery and 4 museum visits. I was hoping for public interaction with the users where they would participate in a dialog after readingmy essays. This did not happen. I only had one private message in my mailbox from someone that visited the Noguchi Museum in Long Island. She said that she enjoyed reading my article and was impressed with all my descriptions. All she could recall of her own visit was that it was "just rocks". By the end of the summer, she visited the Met and she wrote a public message to me about the Tiffany exhibit in which she described her favorite pieces. I asked her how old the stained glass pieces were and if any prices were listed by the curator to keep the dialog going. The public messages stopped after she replied.

I did receive one other message in private, but it was directed at my style of writing. Two public messages were added about other places to visit. One was about a mosaic tile mural that was done by school children through a special art project in the city which is displayed at the Brooklyn Bridge Station and the other was about the Hall of Science in Flushing that was a great place for teachers to take their students on a class trip. I really expected more participation than this. I can only assume it was so small because most of the teachers were on vacation over the summer or that the callers didn't access the area.

I had a completely different response on ECHO, a private Bulletin Board service that charged a monthy fee for access. I was allowed a one month free access so I only published my museum visits on this board. I had several responses from the callers with questions and suggestions of other places to visit. A discussion also started about meeting in the city at the Met for drinks and then touring the exhibits together. My Francis Bacon article brought some controversy. I had negative feelings about his work. The callers on this board actually liked his work and supported their feelings with facts. They also mentioned other artists that I never heard of and I learned a new word "fauvism" that was connected with Matisse. I looked it up in our Art book and it means "wild beast". It was a word used by someone that described Matisse's use of bold colors that were unrelated to the natural world. Most of the users on Echo were College educated, Ph.d.s, and several were published authors. They had a rounder experience with culture since the majority were living in New York City.

On Design Line BBS, I found the users to be more technical and it was not the place to publish my essays. Instead I followed their conversations to see what they talked about. The background of these users, were professional graphic artists, commercial artists, or aspiring young artists making networking contacts in the art field. The messages were of a nature of using new technology for creating commercial art and sharing of the knowledge of the new media. This board was for finding job contacts and finding help on special projects that were never tried before. They were creating a database of original graphic art that could be transferred over the modem.

Learning Link was another educational computerized system on which I published my museum visits. The board was very empty of public messages for several weeks, since it is used more often during the school year. The cross section of users were teachers, school libraians, and students. There were no public responses to my museum visits. I only had one private message from the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., that was encouraging as follows:

From-Donna Mann, National Gallery of ART;
Date-Aug. 15, 1990 at 1:58pm;

"Your report was fascinating! We are at the National Gallery of Art demonstrating a new LEARNING LINK forum which is being developed in cooperation with the National Gallery. We were talking about how a discussion might be useful so I went to demonstrate a discussion and found your topics. It really helped emphasize our point. Watch for the forum which should be mounted in the early fall on this LEARNING LINK service."

Learning Link has special areas for Culture and they list different museum visits in the Metropolitan area that are suitable for class trips. The suggested visits also outline lesson plans and activities for teachers to do before and after a visit. I was very impressed with the database of lesson plans available in the art and culture area. The National Gallery will be added in the fall and I think they want to include a discussion area from what I understand from Donna Mann's message, besides just listing the resources and lesson plans. Learning Link has many other topics available and is a tremendous resource for teachers that use the on-line technology. They also give the TV schedule for PBS broadcasts and lesson plans to be used with the video that may be purchased through the educational service.

Compuserve is the last service that I investigated for what was available for the arts. I found a special ART GALLERY that had several graphic pictures by well known artists that could be "downloaded" or transferred right to my disk at home over the phone lines. There were viewers also available for every brand of computer. Since there was an hourly fee connected with my investigating this service, I only downloaded a picture by Escher, called "Waterfall" which was in our Art textbook, a picture of a painting by Cezzane, and a series of prints of women by Nagel. There was a discussion area, but it was more on the line of the technology involved rather than art or artists. I demonstrated the viewer and pictures to my teacher at our last meeting. She did not say if she was impressed or not. She did ask me about the technology involved in creating the pictures and I tried to explain .GIF and .Tiff files to her as best I could from what I learned through the messages on the bulletin boards. I could not do the hands on creating myself, since I needed extra hardware and software (Digitizer equipment for the .GIF and a Scanner for .Tiff files). My teacher admitted that she was not computer literate, but that her husband was and she would show some of my material to him and other teachers before she evaluated my project. This did not surprise me, since most of the teachers that I met during my degree program were not computer literate. I rather enjoyed sharing what I knew with them. I saw that there was a need for training teachers to integrate technology into other curriculum areas and not just teaching computer science and programming in our schools.

There are thousands of computerized Bulletin Boards across the country to choose from, but these were just what I ran into over the short time limit I had over the summer of 1990. I think I would have had more interaction if the members of our Art Class had participated in this project. It would have been interesting to share what each of us saw and felt from the same visits by reading our comments on-line. As this new technology becomes available to more people (modem telecommunications), I can forsee the benefits of using this medium by future study groups for long distance learning. This is just the beginning of what will be available in the new "Telecommunication Age", and a project like this could be used with a thematic approach to bring telecommunications into the classroom.